

Livermore Hearing

Statement of Supervisor Leroy Ornellas
San Joaquin County, Fifth District
CARES Commission Public Hearing
October 1, 2003

Mark Bagg
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Dear Chairman and Commissioners,

It is an honor and a privilege to speak before you today on behalf of the veterans of San Joaquin County who have fought to preserve every privilege, we as Americans, enjoy today.

The attacks of "9-11" and subsequently the "War on Terrorism" have changed our Country forever. Specifically, it has changed the lives of our military men and women.

The war on terrorism is a necessary action. It is as necessary as the daily service of our police and firefighters in the name of public safety.

Our American fighting forces have taken the battle to the enemy, rather than meeting them again, in the streets of our own communities.

With this effort, comes an increased tempo – longer and more frequent deployments. The eventual results are increased injuries to our country's protectors. Obviously, this will increase the need for Veteran's Services.

No region is immune. In my hometown of Tracy, we have suffered the loss of one of our brave souls. Virtually, every city in our country will have a loved one serve in this war on terrorism.

The need for increased and more accessible services is obvious. Here at the VA Palo Alto Healthcare System, I believe you have the right staff in place to meet the coming challenges. Having met with them, on more than one occasion, I am confident in their knowledge and dedication. I am aware of their proposed changes over the next 5-10 years.

Over time, I have heard numerous veterans of San Joaquin County and their spouses; complain about the drive to the Livermore Hospital. The need for a VA clinic in San Joaquin County is best highlighted by the size and growth of the county's veteran population. The California Department of Veterans Affairs reported in 2001, a veteran population of 37,967 in San Joaquin County. This represented a one-year increase of 282 veterans. It is my understanding that San Joaquin County's veteran population is growing, while that of other counties is declining.

In March of 2003, there were 6,915 veterans enrolled at the Stockton Community Based Outpatient Clinic. This number represents approximately twenty percent of the total veterans population in our county. Presently, the clinic is fully utilized and due to the recent addition of a new physician it is expected that the clinic will meet the 30-day wait period for new enrollees.

The current trends in population growth and changes in veteran populations warrant the continued existence of the Stockton Clinic with an expanded presence to accommodate the ever-increasing veteran population in San Joaquin County.

Fiscal Year 2002 workload and enrollment statistics show the Stockton Clinic had 3,632 unique patients and 14,771 outpatient encounters. Additionally, 101 of Livermore Division's 445 extended care admissions in FY02 were from San Joaquin County. Livermore Division's FY02 overall enrollment statistics show that 2,626 enrollees were San Joaquin County residents. And finally, 71 of LVD's 304 employees reside in San Joaquin County.

Currently, the County is negotiating to create a new and modernized workspace for the Stockton Clinic, which we believe will be beneficial to all involved and with the potential to expand services and an improved working environment.

Although it may be years away, San Joaquin County is eager to host any potential future Regional Clinic.

It should be obvious that we in San Joaquin County are looking for expanded services for our Veterans. Additionally, we want these services to be located within reason, considering the potential physical state of an ailing World War II veteran. And finally, we ask that these services be delivered within acceptable time frames.

Specialty services, such as urology, dialysis, and podiatry are needed closer to home. In terms of miles it may not seem that these services are out of reach for our county veterans, but the commute is deceptive. Traffic on I-205, I-580, I-880 and throughout the Bay Area is a difficult task for any commuter, let alone a veteran who may not be in the best of health. These issues must be taken into consideration.

I hope my testimony will prove to be helpful, and again, thank you for the honor of speaking on behalf of San Joaquin County's proud patriots and the protectors of our Republic.